

## Salvadoran war refugees illegally cross into El Paso

Continued  
from Page A-1

Other major crossing points are Tucson and Chula Vista, Calif.

THE U.S. CATHOLIC Conference on Immigration and Refugees in El Paso is actively involved in obtaining bonds for detained Salvadorans. The organization tries to relocate the aliens with relatives in the United States.

The Salvadorans cross the Juarez border into El Paso in groups of two or three. Sometimes they are smuggled in groups of more than 60 — hidden in the dark, stuffy confines of freight trucks, INS officials say.

The problems involving Salvadorans are further compounded, INS officials say, because of "interference" by church groups, such as the United Church of Christ and the Catholic agency.

"It has been a circus in McAllen," Richardson said. "When the news media got a story and showed a hotel on television where Salvadorans were being kept, people were coming by trying to take carloads of them to Houston for \$200 each."

AL VELARDE, director of the Southwest U.S. Catholic Conference on Immigration and Refugees in El Paso, said the conference supports asylum for Salvadorans because they would be persecuted if they are returned to their country.

Other groups involved in seeking

asylum for Salvadoran refugees include the Lutheran Church, American Friends and the Texas Conference of Churches, Velarde said.

"A year ago, nearly all the people in the INS detention center in El Paso were Mexicans," Velarde said. "Now most of them are Salvadorans."

HE SAID THE Catholic agency tries to convince the United States government to grant political asylum to Salvadorans.

"The moment that any refugee steps into the U.S. he automatically has constitutional rights. And we want to make sure these rights are being enforced."

Salvadorans deported from El Paso were given calling cards and told to contact the Catholic conference when they arrived back home, Velarde said. "We have received no calls. I gave away 67 cards."

NOT ONLY ARE the Salvadorans fleeing their country because of the civil war, they come to the United States looking for work.

"There are no jobs in El Salvador," Martinez said. "And the guerrillas shoot the people," he said referring to the civil war between the left and right factions in his country.

While in El Salvador, Martinez was a truck driver who had not worked for a year. When he did work, he was paid \$8 per day to support his family of five, he said.

45, MRS. GARTON SAID.

THE CIVIL WAR has caused factories to be shut down and Salvadorans of all economic classes are out of work, he said.

Martinez escaped the chaos when he and a group of others paid to be smuggled from El Salvador to the United States.

He traveled in darkness for nine days, he said, tucked away in a specially designed bus. "There was little food, little water."

HOWEVER, MARTINEZ was arrested shortly after he crossed the border. He was dropped off in Juarez and was to meet his smugglers in El Paso who then were to take him to California.

As it turned out, Martinez joined 58 other Salvadorans at the Border Patrol detention center in El Paso.

He made friends with Lopez, who left El Salvador in 1978, prior to the outbreak of war.

LOPEZ HAS WORKED odd jobs in the United States since 1978, but was apprehended in Las Cruces by Border Patrol agents when he was en route to California from Florida.

Lopez said his working permit papers expired in October and he was arrested in November. He said he is hoping his family in California can obtain new papers for him before he has to return home.

"I don't want to go back and be killed," he said. "I want to stay in the United States and work."